

Japanese Brazilians: A Positive Ethnic Minority in a Racial Democracy

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Introduction

Today Brazil is home to about one and half million people of Japanese descendant.¹ This number makes Brazil home to the largest Japanese diaspora in the world. The ancestors of today's Japanese Brazilians came in the early twentieth century. Since then, together with other modern ethnic immigrants (particularly Germans and Italians), these Japanese Brazilians form the new middle class in a society that has long been divided into a small rich elite vs. a large population living in relative poverty.²

At least one American anthropologist, Takeyuki Tsuda calls Japanese Brazilians a "positive minority."³ According to Tsuda, Japanese are demographically and politically not a major power in

¹ "Japan-Brazil Relations," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/latin/brazil/data.html>.

² Charles Wagley, *An Introduction to Brazil*, Revised Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 91-133.

³ Tsuda, Takeyuki. "Ethnic Preferences: Positive Minority Status of Japanese Brazilians and Their Ethnic Encounters with Other Minority Groups in Brazil," in *Encounters: People of Asian Descent in the Americas*, ed. Rustomji-Kerns, Roshni, Rajini Srikanth, and Leny Mendoza Strobel. (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publisher, 1999), p. 210.

Brazil; however, Japanese Brazilians enjoy higher socioeconomic status than the majority of the populace and their distinctive cultural qualities and social positions are respected. The term "positive minority" is roughly equivalent to other "model minority" monikers used for Asian Americans in North America. Various scholars, including the authors in this special issue, have pointed out how contentious such terms are. However there have been very few studies on positive-minority-images out side of the United States in general or of Asian Brazilians in particular.

Brazilian society has been termed a nation of *racial democracy*, because there is supposedly no skin-color-based discrimination.⁴ However, such claims have been challenged by new research⁵ reporting that discrimination based on physical appearance exists in Brazil, perhaps even to an extent equal to that of the United States. Scholars argue that using terms like "positive minority" in a "racial democracy" blinds not only social scientists, but the general population as well. Such discourses may blind minority individuals themselves who overlook real discrimination or other social problems (e.g., a lack of equal opportunities in education) by denying they could possibly be based on physical appearance.

In a "multiracial democracy" class trumps race. As Wagley wrote "Money whitens the skin,' is not unmeaningful. It is easy to lower or to raise the color status of people from one grade to another

⁴ Gilberto Freyre, *Masters and Slaves* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963).

⁵ e.g., Nobuko Adachi, "Is Japonês a Marker of Social Class or a Key Term in the Discourse of Race?: Proposing the Concept of 'Racial Diaspora.'" *Latin American Perspective* 31, no. 3 (2004); George R. Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating Nation Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham and London: Duke University, 1999); Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

according to criteria other than color.”⁶ In other words, the social attitude of Brazilians is if people work hard and receive a higher education, anybody can change their social class, and when people of color fail to raise their social status, it is because they lack skill, ambition, or are just lazy. Members of minority groups who end up impoverished in Brazilian settings often blame the corruption of their government rather than racial discrimination. Yet even those who recognize discrimination are oblivious to seeing how their problems articulate with race, ethnicity, and harassment.

Bonilla-Silva points out that in the United States, “today ‘new racism’ practices have emerged that are more sophisticated and subtle than those typical of the Jim Crow era. Yet ... these practices are as effective as the old ones in maintaining the racial status quo.”⁷ In this article I examine how people of Japanese descent in Brazil have faced social and political discrimination historically because of their physical appearance. And although they are thought to be a “positive minority,” Japanese Brazilians still face racial and ethnic harassment under the guise of ‘new racisms’ today. In particular I ask four questions: (1) Why did the majority of the first Japanese migrants move into the hinterlands of Brazil to create Japanese-style farm villages, and how did they succeed against the many physical and social obstacles facing them? (2) Why did the second and third generations of Japanese Brazilians abandon this successful agrarian lifestyle, and move to the cities? (3) Why are Japanese Brazilians seen as a positive minority in Brazil, while in Japan they are devalued? (4) if they are a positively valued minority in Brazil, why are Japanese Brazilians still labeled with the pejorative ethnic label “*japonês*?” As global societies world-wide are now increasingly reflecting the kind of

⁶ Wagley, *An Introduction to Brazil*, p.129.

⁷ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), p. 25.

demography seen in Brazil, this study has implications beyond Brazilian borders for understanding racialization in multiracial, multicultural societies.

A Glass Half Full or Half Empty?: The Social Significance of Browning or Whitening

While the United States was constructing the "model minority" image for Asian Americans during the civil rights movement in the 1960s⁸, Brazil was reforming its national image with the theory of racial democracy. This theory was first advocated by Gilberto Freyre in 1933 and revived in the 1960s by not only local but even influential foreign scholars like Charles Wagley, Marvin Harris, and Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto who participated a UNESCO project on race in Brazil. They confirmed that unlike North America, interracial marriage was and is common in Brazil creating a color "cline" rather than color blocks. As a result there could be no skin-color or origin-based social discrimination in Brazil they argued. Being that such ideas have long been supported by notable Brazilianists and social scientists, even today many scholars still argue that race is seen in gradations and mixtures, not absolutes, in Brazil.

In the United States, as is seen in the cases of Adolph Plessy of 1896 and Susie Phipps of 1986, if one had even one drop of African blood, he or she was defined as Black. In Brazil color has been treated as a continuum and miscegenation as a process of whitening a people, *blanqueamiento*. A person of mixed skin-color is not *preto* (a black) but *pardo* (a brown). The racial democracy theorists pointed out that Brazilians defined even members of their families using

⁸ e.g., Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin. *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Bolder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

different color descriptors; even the people who identified themselves as *brancos* (whites) without any hesitation may say they have some American Indian and African blood in them. According to racial democracy theorists, then, racial discrimination can hardly exist in Brazil.

However, skin color was a marker of social class in the traditional highly stable two-class system of Brazil⁹ and class-based prejudice entailed color-based bias. Today Brazilian society is changing and a new middle class has developed. However as Wagley points out “membership of social class [is], in a sense, hereditary.”¹⁰ However, this idea of class introduces as many new questions as it supposedly answers. I wonder if today the social class system is as stable as half a century ago? And I wonder if skin color can really be a marker of social class? And if it is, why are a majority of poor people colored if no structural or social bias exists? And can skin color and social class be easily separated in daily life? I see arguments about mixed-heritage persons being black or brown, on the way to becoming white, as kind of is-the-glass-half-empty-or-half full question. In reality, blacks and mixed-heritage people of color have not been given the full privileges whiteness conveys even in Brazil.

After the New World was discovered in the fifteenth century by Europeans, it was colonized by them. Brazil was no exception. Although until 1872 there was no official statistical information on Brazilian demography, in analyzing incomplete and indirect information Bergad¹¹ estimates a total of four million slaves from

⁹ Wagley, *An Introduction to Brazil*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Laird W. Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 96.

Africa were brought to Brazil. This number represents nearly forty percent of all slaves forced to cross the Atlantic, and more than ten times the number of slaves brought to the United States. In 1825, three years after gaining independence from Portugal, Brazil's population was four million, of whom 1.96 million were "Negroes," 1.12 million "mixed breeds and Indians" and 920,000 "whites."¹² Whites were demographically a minority but politically in control. Like other Latin American nation-states, they thought they had to "whiten" the population if Brazil was to become a "true" nation. This ideology was called the "whitening movement," and led to laws that allowed for liberal European immigration to Brazil.

The views of the United States and Brazil toward miscegenation were different: an attempt at whitening the population in Brazil; an attempt to keep the races clearly separated into Blacks and Whites in United States. Now while "whitening" in Brazil weakened the black/white dichotomy as it is found in the United States, in the end the results were very much the same. People of color in both places faced extreme social discrimination.

Alvarez and Juang state that one of the major issues for Asian Americans regarding race is consciousness-raising: to deal with the awareness of the existence of possible racial discrimination. "How is it that some individuals readily recognize racism whereas other individuals trivialize it or deny its existence?"¹³ This exact the same question applies to racial issues of Asian Brazilians.

The construction of race issues extends well beyond skin color. What are seen as normative or "sophisticated" cultural customs,

¹² Cited in Wagley 1971, p 20. (See original Arthur Ramos, *A mestiçagem no Brasil* [The Miscegenation in Brazil]. Maceió: EDUFA, 2003 [1951]), p. 131.

¹³ Alvin Alvarez and Linda Juang. "Asian Americans and Racism: When Bad Things Happen to 'Model Minorities.'" *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2006): p. 479.

religions, social morals, and all other basic social components were brought from Europe to the United States and Brazil. From the perspectives of immigrant Europeans, the cultural customs, behaviors, and languages of Africans, Asians, and native Indians were seen not only as different, but odd—impossible to understand, unsophisticated and uneducated. Thus, barriers well beyond differences in physical appearance separated the people of “color” from the “white” elite.

Hirschfeld argues that it is easy to blame a group that easily stands out— such as people of color, who are not only easily spotted by physical appearance, but display differences in culture, history, class, and economics.¹⁴ Asian immigrants to Western countries, who wished to save money as quickly as possible and to return to their home countries, were seen as workaholics, greedy, or too serious. And African slaves, those who were forced to work, were marked as lazy. Once people are stereotyped, such stereotypes are constantly mocked and reproduced in society. Today’s labels for Japanese Brazilians as a “positive minority,” and Asian Americans as “model minority,” reflect such stereotypes. According to Sze Wei Ang “the act of labeling some minorities but not another as “good,” perpetuates the kind of systemic violence that affects all minorities, and demonstrates how the declarations of moral right—or wrong—enable the formation or renegotiation of national or racial identities.”¹⁵ The labels of “model minority,” “positive minority,” and “negative minority” encourage isolationist perspectives and

¹⁴ Lawrence A. Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making: Cognition, Culture, and the Child's Construction of Human Kinds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Sze W. Ang, “The Politics of Victimization and the Model Minority.” *The New Centennial Review* 11, no 3 (2011): p. 120.

competition among minority groups in ways that obfuscate the infrastructural sources of social problems in the context of society as a whole. In order to see how Japanese immigrants first established themselves in Brazil I examine the social, economic, and political conditions of Japanese Brazilians under Brazilian national ideology and national political policy. I analyze how such national ideology and political agendas oppressed Japanese Brazilians.

Whitening Ideology and Estado Novo National Policy

The Immigration Ban for People of Color

After Japan ended its civil war in 1868 and the new government enforced rapid Westernization, Japanese citizens faced one of the most serious economic crises in their history for several decades. In order to survive, many sought work in places even overseas, including Hawaii, California, Vancouver, and São Paulo. As soon as the first Brazil-Japan treaty was signed in 1895, Japanese requested work permits from the Brazilian government.

In those days Brazil was looking for plantation workers. The national income of Brazil had relied on plantation crops such as sugar, rubber, and coffee, and plantation labor in the past had been African slaves. However, the Brazilian government abolished the importation of slaves from Africa in 1850. Instead, they encouraged plantation owners to invite immigrants from Europe. These actions were intended to whiten the population. Although the abolition of slavery was due to strong pressure from the abolitionist movement from Europe, the Brazilian slaves were not freed until 1888. Before it became independent from Portugal in 1822, Brazil was not the home of European elites (unlike North America). While in the uncivilized, hot and humid, dangerous colony of Brazil, European men stayed to run businesses; they left their wives and families back in Europe. As a result “the white men of the plantation houses took full advantage of

the black women.”¹⁶ Brazil’s miscegenation advanced. According to the first Brazilian demographic census, *Recenseamento Do Brazil Em 1872*¹⁷, there were 3,787, 289 *Branco*s (whites), 3,324,278 *Pardos* (Browns/ mixed heritage between blacks and whites), 921,150 *Pretos* (Blacks), and 386,955 (mixed heritage between American Indians and whites). When Brazil became independent from Portugal in 1822, the Brazilian élites thought that in order to become a “true” nation, Brazil needed to increase the number of whites or “true” people and “real” families (instead of keeping social conditions colony-like). As a result Brazilian élites invited white people to migrate to Brazil. The national ideology of *blanqueamiento*, “the whitening movement,” provided an opportunity to seek plantation labor from European migratory workers.

Under this national ideology Japanese were not acceptable immigrants. But under intensifying pressure from Japan to issue working permits, the São Paulo secretary of agriculture sent an agent to contract six hundred Japanese families in 1901. Still, Brazil’s minister plenipotentiary in Tokyo, Manuel de Oliveira Lima, suggested Brazil should not accept any Japanese in Brazil. He argued that it would be a danger to mix inferior races (which included the Japanese) with Brazilian population.¹⁸ However, European migratory

¹⁶ Bradford E. Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 2nd Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 55.

¹⁷ See *Recenseamento Do Brazil Em 1872*, <http://www.google.com/search?q=Imperio+do+Brazil+1872.pdf&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>, accessed in Feb. 12, 2014

¹⁸ See Lesser, *Negotiating Nation Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*, p. 84.

workers were often discontented and turned to their consulates asking to be taken back home before their contracts ended because the working conditions were so poor. Before this situation developed into a foreign affairs embarrassment, the Brazilian government had to solve the problem.

While Brazil faced problems, and had to let many of their European-immigrant plantation workers go home, the Japanese kept asking to work in Brazil. Ryo Mizuno, a Japanese official who wished to send Japanese laborers to Brazil, went to the country to negotiate possibilities for Japanese farmhands. He even brought a Japanese citizen with him and installed the worker on a plantation to demonstrate how diligent Japanese could be. As a result, plantation owners finally convinced the government to issue Japanese working permits. But the Japanese had to fulfill some conditions in order to immigrate. For example, immigrants had to be farmers. And they had to bring at least two family members with them to work on the same plantation. According to Handa, this was because if these migrants had their wives and children with them, it would be hard for them to run away from the plantations at night as some slaves and previous migrants had done.¹⁹ Yet, plantation owners also stated that children under the age of twelve were not counted, since they were not yet big enough to engage in farm labor with adults.²⁰ Regardless of those conditions, 781 Japanese laborers migrated into coffee plantations in 1908.

¹⁹ Tomō Handa, *Imin no Seikatsu no Rekishi: Burajiru Nikkei-jin no Ayunda Michi* [The History of Japanese Immigrants: How the Japanese-Brazilians Passed This Way] (São Paulo: Centrode Estudos Nipo-Brazilerios, 1970).

²⁰ See Imin 80-Nin-Shi Hensan Inkaikai *Burajiru Nihon Imin 80-Nen-shi* [Brazil: Eighty Years of Japanese-Brazilian History] (São Paulo: Tupã, 1991).

Creation of Japanese Communities in the Hinterlands

The Japanese migratory workers engaged in farm labor with former slaves, and shared their living quarters. They not only received the same treatment as did the former slaves, their conditions were more prison-like. For example, many plantation managers opened immigrants' personal letters and care-packages before they passed them on to the workers.²¹ Today, Japanese Brazilians might say this was not because Japanese immigrants were racially looked down upon; that is *just the way local Brazilians are*. This is because Japanese Brazilians, too, became blind to racism, and they themselves started treating other people, especially *caboclo* (peasant) workers with covert acts of racist disdain. Back then Japanese immigrants just felt resentment over such treatment. Handa, who immigrated to a coffee plantation with his parents at age eleven, wrote that most Japanese wished to leave these slave-like conditions as soon as possible.²²

Around the time that Japanese started arriving on the plantations, the price of coffee dropped drastically due to world-wide over-production. Furthermore, many of the Brazilian coffee trees were now old and plantation owners could not or did not replant new ones. The future of the coffee economy became uncertain. As a result, many owners tried to struggle through the bad economy by paying farmhands with credit-tickets for plantation stores instead of in cash. The prices of items at these stores were much higher than at stores outside plantations. Having no means of transportation to get off the plantations and then stuck with the vouchers, workers had to purchase their foods and daily necessities in these expensive stores.²³

²¹ See Handa, *Imin no Seikatsu no Rekishi: Burajiru Nikkei-jin no Ayunda Michi*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Personal communication, Hirano Colony, 1992.

Thus, Japanese immigrants could not save the money that they had been promised before they had left Japan. They felt cheated by the owners and managers. They also had uneasy feelings toward their local Brazilian neighbors and co-workers. The following entry is typical of the attitude many Japanese immigrants held at the time:

The wife, whose stomach was always enormously big because of pregnancy, always yelled at the children as if she was always angry. ...[A] wife of a Brazilian neighbor came over with a porcelain cup or a metal can and asked, "May I borrow ..." ... "May I borrow..." meant "Give me..." for the Brazilians. ... (However) for a Japanese, it would be improper not to return what once borrowed. The Japanese sometimes asked them to return what they had borrowed and the Brazilians answered, "I don't have it now, but I'll return it tomorrow." Tomorrow meant never and they did not return it for sure. The case of food was excusable. But if they took a tool ... after three days or a week passed, the tool became theirs. Later on, if the Japanese person claimed it, saying, "This is mine. Didn't you borrow it from me?" they would answer, "No sir, this is mine." It was not fair to the Japanese.²⁴

This image is representative of stereotypes the Japanese Brazilians had of the local Brazilians. Talking to Japanese Brazilians, one hears that the Japanese immigrants who had young children feared that if they died by tropical disease in Brazil—and indeed, many, did die by malaria—their children would suffer among those local Brazilians?

Feeling resentment and fear over their physical and social conditions on the plantations, most immigrants wished to return to Japan as soon as possible. However, it was not only difficult to save up enough to return home, it was even difficult to pay back the initial

²⁴ Handa, *Imin no Seikatsu no Rekishi: Burajiru Nikkei-jin no Ayunda Michi*, pp.132-133.

cost of transportation loaned to the migratory workers in advance to come to Brazil. If they could not return to Japan soon, they desperately wished to get out from the slave-like conditions on the plantations and be together with other Japanese immigrants.²⁵ The Japanese migrants then used a Japanese traditional financial system called *tanomoshikō* to move out from the plantations. They pooled their small savings and used this to release a person who was almost completing his debt from his obligation to the plantation owner. The persons who were released continued to pool their savings with those who were still back on the plantations, and this enabled others to leave. As a result, then, the Japanese left plantations one by one. These Japanese moved into areas where their friends, relatives, or other Japanese were making their life. Those who were now living independently had purchased or leased small lands to farm. The lands, which they could afford, were often located in hinterlands where the price of land was cheap. As a result the Japanese gradually became concentrated in certain areas. By 1932, 27.2 percent of the rural Japanese had become landowners, 19.9 percent tenant farmers, 15.3 percent sharecroppers, and 3.7 percent rural wage laborers.²⁶ Prior to World War II, the majority of Japanese immigrants and their children were in those farming areas. Only a few chose to leave the rural countryside for urban centers to be with Brazilians.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Takashi Maeyama, "Tomate to Kompyūtā [Tomato and Computer]," *Koronia Bungaku* 18 (1972): pp. 155; Burajiru Nikkeijin Jittai Chōsa Iinkai, *Burajiru no Nihon Imin* [The Japanese Immigrants in Brazil] (São Paulo: Centrodos Estudos Nipo-Brazileros, 1964), p. 314.

Nationalization of the Vargas Regime: A Case of Scapegoat Discrimination

In the 1930s when Getúlio Vargas took political power as in Brazil, he placed restrictions on immigration and curtailed immigrants' rights. These actions are referred to as the Nationalization Project. The government's justification for the project was to prevent activities of anarchists²⁷ and communists²⁸ coming into the nation. Although Japanese immigrants were not people the government initially targeted, Japanese Brazilian life and society was greatly affected by the Nationalization Project. In 1934, new quotas limited immigrants from any given country to two percent of the total who had already immigrated in the last fifty years. This adversely affected newcomers such as Japanese, Arabs, and Jews, who were relatively recent arrivals. Italians, Germans, and other western Europeans who had a longer history of immigration were not as affected.²⁹

Saito argues that the policy restricting new immigrants reflected not particularly communist or anarchist fears, but the

²⁷ Boris Fausto, "Society and Politics," in *Brazil Empire and Republic, 1822-1930*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): pp. 287-289; Michael M. Hall and Marco A. Garcia, "Urban Labor," in *Modern Brazil: Elites and Masses in Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael L. Conniff & Frank D. McCann (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991): pp. 171-174.

²⁸ Ronald M. Schneider, *Brazil: Culture and Politics in a New Industrial Powerhouse* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 63-64.

²⁹ See Lesser, *Negotiating Nation Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*, pp. 130; N. Kinshichi, et. al., *Burajiru Kenkyū Nyū-mon: Shirarezaru Taikoku 500-nen no Kiseki* [Introduction to Brazilian Studies: The Five-hundred Year Miracle on an Unknown Continent] (Tokyo: Kōyō-Shobō, 2000), p. 140.

Vargas regime's xenophobia.³⁰ Brazil, as a former Portuguese colony, looked to Europe for cultural and educational values. Psychologically, European people were not seen as "foreigners" but as distant relatives, cousins, or even "fathers and mothers." On the other hand, the little-known ethnic groups whose members had immigrated to Brazil more recently were true aliens, who might plan on sabotaging the Brazilian state or society. Lesser sees these immigration quotas as a "state-driven homogenization program [with the intention of] preserving Brazilian identity from the encroachment of ethnicity by eliminating distinctive elements of [new] immigrant culture."³¹ People of color were most suspicious and this included the Japanese who were among the most restricted of immigrants. Regardless of their status as Brazilian nationals, children of Japanese immigrants were seen by most Brazilians as ethnically equivalent to their parents, and they called them *japonês/japonesa* ("Japanese" in Portuguese). This was likely because most Japanese were concentrated far away in hinterlands, and were an unfamiliar "Other" for most Brazilians.

Under the Brazilian constitution of 1937—called the *Estado Novo* or New State—the teaching of foreign languages was banned, and in 1938 foreign language schools were closed. This was especially detrimental to Japanese Brazilians. Since the majority of Japanese immigrants lived in the interior where many Brazilian teachers refused to go, the Japanese founded their own schools. By 1938, there were 476 such Japanese schools³² established and these were

³⁰ See Hiroshi Saito, *Burajiru no Seiji: Barugasu kara Gaizeru e no Gekidō Seiji-shi* [Brazilian Politics: The History of Political Upheaval—from Vargas to Geisel] (Tokyo: The Simul Press, 1976), p. 75.

³¹ Lesser, *Negotiating Nation Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*, p. 130.

³² See Imin 80-Nin-Shi Hensan Iinkai, *Burajiru Nibon Imin 80-Nen-shi*, p. 119.

now forced to close with no government plans in place for the education of the Japanese-Brazilian children in these areas. It is worth noticing that the Minister of Education then was Oliveira Vianna who was a leader of the “whitening” program.”³³ Vianna stated that declining African fertility and increasing European immigration would “Aryanize” Brazil.³⁴

In 1941, World War II for the Western Hemisphere began. In Brazil, foreign language publications were banned. The Japanese and Japanese Brazilians depended on their newspapers for their news and information—local, national and international. The Brazilian government, fearing rebellion, prevented the assembling of not only Japanese nationals, but even the Brazilian-national children of Japanese immigrants. As a result Japanese Brazilians became literally isolated in their forests. The Brazilian government claimed that while getting together, *japonês* would plan for a revolution against their “enemy” nation, Brazil. The government surely must have known that such fears had no basis: Japanese and Japanese-Brazilians constituted only about one percent of the population. And the large Brazilian standing army also assured the nation’s security against any threats by Japanese descendent farmers—who in those days had only hoes as potential weapons and resided in the middle of nowhere.³⁵

³³ Oliveira Vianna used the term *embranquecimento* (whitening) in his book, *Populaces Meridionais do Brasil* [The Southern Populations of Brazil], which was published in 1920.

³⁴ In David Cleary, “Race, Nationalism and Social Theory in Brazil: Rethinking Gilberto Freyre,” *Harvard Working Papers Series*. WPTC-99-09, 1999. Retrieved October 13, 1999, from <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/cleary.ptf>, p. 6.

³⁵ See Nobuko Adachi, *Language Choice: An Ethnographic Study of the Nôbon-shugi Ideology and Language Maintenance of Japanese immigrants in Brazil*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1997) for details.

Throughout the war, restrictions continued to mount. In 1942, Vargas ordered the Japanese living in the Japantown areas in cities like São Paulo—including Conde de Sarzedas, the area of the highest Japanese concentration in the city—to move to the interior within ten days. In 1943, Japanese (as well as German) settlers on the Atlantic coast were ordered to move to the interior within twenty-four hours. There were German ships appearing off the coast and the Brazilian government was afraid of German and Japanese immigrants helping German spies or saboteurs land in Brazil. Moreover, Japanese-Brazilians had to apply for permits to travel inside Brazil. They were prohibited from buying and selling real property. Most of the real estate they owned was seized. They were subjected to legal domiciliary searches under the excuse that they might have a radio to listen to Japanese news, or were hiding arms and secret information from the army. In 1944, like Japanese in North America, many Japanese in Brazil were also arrested under the suspicion of espionage.³⁶ Japanese-Brazilians, then, share some experiences with the over one hundred thousand Japanese-American citizens who were imprisoned in concentration camps throughout the war. Furthermore, their property was also confiscated (as was that of the Japanese-Americans and Japanese-Canadians).³⁷

³⁶ See Lesser, *Negotiating Nation Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil*; Handa, Tomō. “Tenkanki no Kumon (Agonies of the Turning Points),” in *Burajiru Nikkei Shakai no Ibuki* [The Vitality of the Nikkei Society in Brazil] ed. Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1978): p. 1-36.

³⁷ cf. Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).; Brian M. Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

The difference between Japanese in North America and in Brazil was that the majority of the latter were already residents of “natural” camps in the interior jungles and forests. But in some ways these isolated camps were worse than internment where Japanese descendants received some education though Christian missionaries: unlike their counterparts in North America, Japanese-Brazilians were, theoretically at least, deprived of their native language, schools, newspapers, and information. They were not able to congregate and were pressured to speak only Portuguese.

While the government claimed that Nationalization was for preventing anarchist and communist terrorism, Japanese and their children also became the scapegoats for decades of economic depression in Brazil resulting from the coffee decline and reverberations of the Great Depression in Europe. In his book called *The Scapegoat* René Girard claims that:

the stereotypical accusation justifies and facilitates this belief by ostensibly acting that role of mediator. It bridges the gap between the insignificance of the individual and the enormity of the social body. If the wrongdoers, even the diabolical ones, are to succeed in destroying the community’s distinctions, they must either attack the community directly, by striking at its heart or head, or else they must begin the distinction of difference within their own sphere by committing contagious crimes such as parricide and incest.³⁸

Migrating to a nation where Afro-Brazilians were demographically more numerous and European-Brazilians held political and economic power, Japanese Brazilians were not only one of the last arrivals--and separated from the rest of the Brazilian society—but those of the

³⁸ René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p.15.

first generation were declared enemy foreigners. Tuan claims that xenophobic fear causes racial conflict and discrimination in the United States even today.³⁹ Brazil was little different from North America. In Brazil the Nationalization Project triggered increased xenophobia against Japanese Brazilians because it accentuated racial and language differences.

The Result of Losing Their Language: The Kachi-gumi And Make-gumi Conflict

In August 1945 World War II ended, but a new battle was about to start in Japanese Brazilian society. Soon after the result of the war was announced, Japanese Brazilian society split into two factions. The Kachi-gumi (the “Victory Group”)—disregarding official pronouncements by the Brazilian government and the media—believed that Japan had actually won the war, while the Make-gumi (the “Defeat Group”) accepted the fact that Japan had lost. In March 1946, the first victim of Kachi-gumi terrorism died in his home in the Bastos Japanese-Brazilian settlement village, located in São Paulo State. The affair escalated, and the violence had repercussions in other Japanese Brazilian settlements. By July 1946, almost every other day, Make-gumi people were attacked by the Kachi-gumi. There were a total of 17 cases in that month, with ten people killed and seven injured.

In 1946, after targeted fights between the Kachi-gumi and the Make-gumi, Kachi-gumi terrorism spread to non-Japanese Brazilian areas. In Oswaldo Cruz, a town about 20 kilometers from Bastos,

³⁹ See Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

non-Japanese-Brazilians shouted to Japanese Brazilians, “Go home, *japonês*,” a cry that motivated the Japanese Brazilians to start fighting back. The quarrels escalated into a fight and a non-Japanese-Brazilian was murdered by a Japanese-Brazilian. Anti-Japanese protests and Kachi-gumi/Make-gumi fighting led to an all-out mob scene involving the whole town. The Brazilian army was dispatched a week later, establishing order.

According to Handa at first the majority of Japanese Brazilians believed in a Japanese victory, and very few accepted Japan's loss.⁴⁰ This was largely due to a lack of news available in the isolated Japanese-Brazilian community, and the heresy and rumor rampant at the time. Handa reported that after the ban on Japanese newspapers during the war, some Japanese settlers heard news from Japan on hidden short-wave radios that escaped detection by police.⁴¹ But they caught this news only sporadically, and what they heard was often just Japanese propaganda; even the Japanese in Japan did not know how badly the war was going for them, nor did they learn of their defeat until after it occurred. It is not so surprising, then, that some Japanese in Brazil could not believe Japan was defeated. Although Brazilians told of an impending Allied victory, many Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Brazilians could not dismiss the rumor they were hearing or the news they were hearing on the radio. Besides, many of these Japanese hardly understood a word of Portuguese, so full explanations could never be absorbed. Tomō Handa⁴² tells of his own (probably typical) reactions at the time:

⁴⁰ See Handa, *Imin no Seikatsu no Rekishi: Burajiru Nikkei-jin no Ayunda Michi*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Personal communication in 1992; also see Handa, *Imin no Seikatsu no Rekishi: Burajiru Nikkei-jin no Ayunda Michi*, pp. 644-647.

One day we were told that Japan was defeated by the Allies. Although we knew the news of the Japanese government had to be a little exaggerated, we could not believe that everything they told was a lie. It just could not be true. Regardless of what Brazilian newspapers were saying, we tried to understand what the Emperor said to the Japanese through his radio broadcast of August 14, 1945. After consulting with each other, we all agreed that what Emperor said was true: Japan had been defeated by the Allies. But even though we felt something was wrong, some people anyhow said, “That's right, that's right. We won!” So we started to believe in the victory of Japan.

A linguistic point needs to be mentioned. Until the current Emperor (who assumed the throne in 1989), the Japanese sovereign never spoke to commoners in the daily vernacular and was only seen on rare occasions. The majority of the people even in Japan did not immediately understand what the language of his announcement meant. Little wonder, then, that Japanese Brazilians whose language had shifted in the decades or generations they had been away, were confused.

I believe this conflict between Japanese Brazilians and other Brazilians was due to a lack of accurate information available to the Japanese Brazilians, rather than being a case of these immigrants maintaining allegiance to Japan or rejecting assimilation into Brazilian society. In a sense, the Japanese immigrants in Brazil were victims of both Japanese and Brazilian political agendas. However, even today many Brazilians—and even Japanese Brazilians—believe that the conflict was due to ignorance and resistance to acculturation on the part of Japanese settlers and their children. A new generation of Japanese Brazilians began to actively try and assimilate into the upper middle class of Brazilian society through education.

However these people met substantial resistance. Takashi Maeyama, a Japanese Brazilian anthropologist, mentions that some

Japanese Brazilians felt they had been looked down upon by non-Japanese Brazilians for many years. Since there were few non-Japanese or Asians in the regions where the majority of Japanese Brazilians had settled, Japanese Brazilians were physically conspicuous vis-à-vis African and European Brazilians. When Maeyama interviewed Japanese Brazilians in 1966 and 1967, many young Japanese Brazilians surprised him by confessing “We would have no problems in Brazilian society, if we did not have this face and these eyes.”⁴³

Maeyama also mentions that right after the war young Japanese Brazilians argued for assimilating with non-Japanese Brazilians rather than living among themselves. Even in the 1950s Japanese Brazilian gatherings were criticized by young Japanese Brazilians as being little more than racial “nests.”⁴⁴ The view of racial “nests” was also fostered by the policy of the Vargas regime (1934-1938). During the Vargas regime, labor movements and organizations were often persecuted because they were thought to be cells of communists, or “organs of collaboration”⁴⁵

By the 1970s, believing the Kachi-gumi and Make-gumi conflicts were the result of their parents’ lack of education, Japanese Brazilians started leaving the farming areas for the São Paulo City to receive a higher education. The younger generation criticized their

⁴³ Maeyama, Takashi. *Ibō ni “Nihon” o Masuru: Burajiru Nikkeijin no Shūkyō to Esunisiti* [Worshipping Japan in a Foreign Country: Japanese-Brazilian Religions and Ethnicity] (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1997), pp. 56-57.

⁴⁴ See Takashi Maeyama, *Ibō ni “Nihon” o Masuru: Burajiru Nikkeijin no Shūkyō to Esunisiti* [Worshipping Japan in a Foreign Country: Japanese-Brazilian Religions and Ethnicity] (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1997), pp. 60-62.

⁴⁵ See Hall & Garcia, “Urban Labor,” p.171.

parents for being unsophisticated, and called them *macaco velho* (old monkeys).

This term comes from the Portuguese proverb, *Macaco velho não mete a mão em cumbuca* ("An old monkey will not get his hand stuck in a jar"), and is generally used positively. However *macaco velho* is used differently by younger generations of Japanese Brazilians regarding their parents and grandparents. In this case, it means that the "wise" Japanese immigrants did not stick their hands into upper crust Brazilian society—and thus, did not get their hand stuck in the jar (i.e., directly face discrimination from mainstream Brazilian society). But at the same time, they did not even know there *was* a jar (i.e., society) into which they might stick their hands.

Young Japanese Brazilians, then, voluntarily moved from their farming villages to urban areas to receive higher education and try and achieve upward social mobility. Families again planned things financially ahead of time. One family member was selected to attend college first. Following Japanese tradition, eldest sons succeed their families and stayed engaging in farming with their parents and sent money to their younger brothers in the cities for their education. By the 1980s about 12 or 13 percent of the students at most major universities in São Paulo State were Japanese Brazilians.⁴⁶ Ironically, going to school together with upper-middle-class people, Japanese Brazilians learned the differences between the cultural values of the upper-middle classes and Japanese Brazilians. Traditionally, Japanese Brazilians respected farming. However, following upper- and middle-class Brazilian culture, educated Brazilians saw engaging in manual labor as the purview of the lower classes. Many Japanese Brazilians began to feel shame regarding their parents and brothers. As a result,

⁴⁶ See Miyao Susumu, *Bōdarezu ni naru Nikkeijin: Burajirin no Nikkei Sakai Ronsbū* [Japanese descendants Becoming Borderless: Collected Works of Nikkei Society] (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brazileros, 2004), p. 45.

they often did not even invite their family, who supported their education by engaging in farming, to their graduation ceremonies.⁴⁷

Is it Friendly Teasing or Racial Harassment?

As I described, many people in Brazil do hold prejudicial views against others, in spite of supposedly living in a racial democracy. Even today racial insults are evidenced in the public domain. But because Brazilians are convinced that there is no racial discrimination based on physical appearance, these kinds of comments are often dismissed; it sometimes seems that it is hard for people to believe there is social harassment and discrimination based on race. For example, local Brazilians regularly call and address Japanese Brazilians by a racial label—*japonês*—to distinguish them from other Brazilians. A Japanese American anthropologist, Takeyuki Tsuda, reported this experience:

I was walking innocently down the street in downtown Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul), when suddenly:

“*Oi, japonês!* (Hey, Japanese!)”

Startled, I turned around to find a Brazilian street vendor beckoning to me, trying to interest me in his goods.

“*Só três mil cruzeiros, japonês* (Only three mil cruzeiros, Japanese) “ he was holding up a bag of apples. ...

⁴⁷ Ibid.

... The friendly attendant quickly confirmed that I had the correct bus stop. Then he gestured toward the bench. “*Senta aqui, japonês* (Sit here, Japanese)”⁴⁸

Local Brazilians called him *japonês* everywhere he went. Tsuda was however convinced that since they are just trying to get his attention to sell apples or something, and they are speaking with a friendly smile, these Brazilians are not using *japonês* as a racial marker. As he explains, “Of course, the issue is one of subjective interpretation. ... For me, ... *japonês* was simply a recognition of *diferença* (this emphasis in the original) and not a prejudicial reaction in which difference is negatively perceived.”⁴⁹ Further, Tsuda argues that the reason for calling him *japonês* is not because of racial harassment but because of ethnic pride. He describes this episode of a Japanese Brazilian family:

My kids came home from school one day somewhat bothered that they are always called *japonês* by the other kinds, ... I told them that the Brazilians are not making fun of them. I told them that being Japanese is a source of pride. The Japanese are respected and admired in Brazil.⁵⁰

But several things suggest that Tsuda maybe being too liberal in his interpretation of this label. For one thing, Brazilians also used *japonês*

⁴⁸ Tsuda, Takeyuki. “The Benefits of Being Minority: The Ethnic Status of the Japanese- Brazilians in Brazil. Working Paper 21 from The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies.” University of California, San Diego (CCIS), 2000, pp. 3-4. Years do not match references in bibliography

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

to refer to anyone of East Asian descent in the country (including Chinese, who do not especially appreciate this). People of Japanese descent are indeed demographically the most common Asian group in Brazil, so probability is on the speaker's side if they use this term for all Asians. Many times they are right.

But many besides Tsuda do not feel insulted by this term. Japanese Brazilians often say that *japonês* is not a racial slur or a gaffe; it is not only used for talking about Asians and Asian Brazilians, but it is used to a term of address. And Tsuda argues that *japonês* could hardly be a racial slur if people use it while conducting business.⁵¹ There is a feeling that *japonês* refers to an economically well-off positive minority. As we saw in the quote above, a mother will tell a child that being teased for being Japanese is supposed to be a source of pride. And Japanese Brazilians are quick to remind me that Brazilians use ethnic labels not only for people of color like the Japanese, but also for "white" people like Germans (for example, *Oi, alemão!* "Hey, German!"). Simply put, they supposedly do not feel anything bad.

But unlike in North America, people of German descent are one of the most recent immigrant groups in Brazil (like the Japanese). And it is these new groups that who are addressed by ethnic labels like *japonês* and *alemão*. And like the Japanese, the Germans have historically been concentrated in certain areas of southern Brazil. Some are still native speakers of German. This is a subtle but important point, because generally Brazilians do not label Italians in the same way. That is, *Oi, italiano!* ("Hey, you Italian!") is hardly ever heard. Perhaps this is because the Italian language is so close to Portuguese, that they cannot be so easily distinguished.

⁵¹ See Tsuda, Takeyuki. "The Benefits of Being Minority: The Ethnic Status of the Japanese- Brazilians in Brazil. Working Paper 21 from The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies." University of California, San Diego (CCIS), 2000.

However, both German Brazilians and Japanese Brazilians are still ethnically outstanding, even to the extent that they could be considered “foreigners.” Regardless of being born and raised in Brazil—and most having never been to Japan—Japanese Brazilians are still constantly marked as “Japanese” or “foreigner.” Even if Japanese Brazilians are not verbally harassed, there are many times when gestures are applied to them. People pointing and making slanted-eye shapes with their fingers are common. As I mentioned earlier, because of the problems around World War II and the Kachi-gumi and Make-gumi conflict, Japanese Brazilians have been very sensitive to their facial features—especially their slanted-eyes which they like to hide behind sunglasses. However, again, Tsuda believes that the Brazilian gestures mimicking the features of Japanese Brazilians are part of Brazilian body language, and not ethnic-bashing:

...this ethnic gesture [slanted eyes] is not intended as an affront directed at the [Japanese Brazilians], but as simply an amusing commentary on their *different* physiognomy. In contrast to the United States, where this gesture is considered to be an ethnic insult, when it was used in Brazil to refer to people or things Japanese, the context was either neutral or even positive.⁵²(emphasis added)

Such supposedly amusing commentaries on “differences” are seen not only in Brazil, but also in the United States. While direct and obvious racial insults are now thankfully rare, Jane Hill has studied

⁵² Ibid., p. 5

the fake or "mock Spanish" often heard in North America.⁵³ Hill believes this kind of covert and subtle racial discourse is frequent and insidious, because unlike slurs and gaffes, covert racist discourse is "invisible." It is so invisible that "mock Spanish" produces little public reaction. For example, I always find some students in my classes who cannot see how 'The Terminator's famous catch phrase "Hasta La Vista, Baby" carries with it a subtle racist overtone. One student even told me that people say it "*just for the sake of it* and Hill is just creating a social problem that does not exist." Such reactions when present typically come from non-Spanish speakers. Spanish speakers more often feel uneasy, or feel the phrase is reproducing negative stereotypes of Mexicans. As Jane Hill points out, using a phrase like "*Hasta La Vista, Baby*" (as Arnold Schwarzenegger did famously in *The Terminator*), suggests a stereotype of Spanish speakers who are treacherous and insincere—who will tell you politely "Until we meet again," but in the next minute, blow you away.⁵⁴

Such things are not just found in films, but in daily life as well, creating and perpetuating ethnic stereotypes (albeit perhaps unintentionally). One such example is the usage of *cerveza* among the middle-class White Americans. White Americans might say something like "Let's go have a beer" or "Let's get together for a few cold ones" for causal inexpensive drinking. In the Southwest middle-class White Americans sometimes say "Let's get together and crack a few *cervezas*." According to Hill this last utterance is in the same register or level of usage as the previous locution ("a few cold ones").⁵⁵ But when the word, *cerveza*, is used the sentence becomes vaguely

⁵³ See Jane H. Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Jane H. Hill, "Hasta La Vista, Baby: Anglo Spanish in the American South West," *Critique of Anthropology* 13. no. 2 (1993): pp. 145-176.

⁵⁴ See Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, p. 120.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

euphemistic and slightly humorous. What is subtly being expressed is something like this: “On this occasion, we will be relaxed about alcohol, the way we believe that Mexicans are relaxed about alcohol, rather than careful and responsible and sober like White people.”⁵⁶ Using a Spanish word casually in this way, the utterance escapes their own attention: there is subtle subtext here about the stereotypical “drunken Mexican.”

While covert racial discourse mocks others, the insult is a “microaggression,” the intent of which is not only invisible, but sometimes the use of Spanish, even in such partial forms, is thought to provide small affirmations of support. For example, a person might innocently ask an Asian American, “Where are you from?” or they might compliment them on their excellent English. Microaggressions are acts of treating people differently because of some assumed racial or ethnic characteristic.

Even in the United States, where such topics are often in the public discourse, microaggressions and unconscious covert racism can be found every day. In Brazil, where people are convinced that their society is a racial democracy, it is very hard for people to realize that *japonês* is a term of the covert racial discrimination, or that the term “positive minority” is a form of microaggression. Saying “you are successful, just like other upper middle class Brazilians” is racist simply because “other upper middle class Brazilians” are not marked as special. However, since Japanese Brazilians think they are being acknowledged for their accomplishments they do not understand why they should be bothered by such language. The problem is, when local Brazilians use a term like *japonês* they are not referring to ethnic pride—which only the members within an ethnic group could

⁵⁶ Ibid.

arbitrate—they are carelessly using it to reduce people to physical features.

And it is very hard for Japanese Brazilians to react to these things or to reply back, because Japanese Brazilians are stereotyped as being “very serious people” by other Brazilians (who supposedly know how to “let it go” and just enjoy life). Thus, they get teased about being overly sensitive or uptight: *japonês, muito sério, neee* (“You Japanese are so very serious, aren't you?”). Thus, they are almost forced by default to buy into the party line that these racial labels are “simply an amusing commentary on” physical differences (as Tsuda said). Even in the phrase *japonês, muito sério, neee* (“You Japanese are so very serious, aren't you?”) we see a racial slight in the tag question. The sentence-final particle *-ne* is typically found in many Japanese conversations, and is an attempt from the speaker to elicit agreement from the listener. Here the tag question marker is exaggerated to “*neee*” making the sentence sound very “Japanese.” Today this is not so common anymore, but Japanese Brazilians used to be teased like this with this “*neee*” marker quite often. One reason was, Japanese Brazilians tended to add this to even Portuguese sentences. The Portuguese tag question marker “*não é*” is colloquially pronounced as “*é*” by non-Japanese Brazilians. This is a similar pronunciation of a colloquial Japanese particle “*ne*.” Japanese, then, often add this particle at the end of a sentence for conformation, both in Japanese and Portuguese. Probably because of this similarity Japanese immigrants often added *ne* at the end of their Portuguese sentences. As a result Japanese Brazilians were teased with “*neeee*.”

When white-middle-class Americans say “Hasta La Vista, Baby” and “*cerveza*” they may not be trying to intentionally hurt Mexicans personally, but entertaining themselves. Regardless, such remarks are insulting and are perceived as such. The gesture of *olhos puxados* (“slanted” Asian “eyes”) and addressing Japanese Brazilians as *japonês* are no different than Mock Spanish. Being labeled a “good” positive minority, Japanese Brazilians are placed in a position where

they are not able to vocalize resistance to such treatment and harassments. And if they vocalized these uneasy feelings, they could be mocked as being *muito sério* ("very serious")—an ethnic group that does not understand humor.

Future Research Directions

Terms like *model minority* and *positive minority* give the impression that such minorities are acknowledged, and that their accomplishments and accepted, by the mainstream society. However, the people who are marked with such terms do not feel exactly on par with the members of the majority by the very fact that they are singled out. And what of the individuals in the *positive minority* who do not fit into the stereotype of success—that is, the average students or average wage-earners? Do they feel like failures because they have not lived up to their ethnic group's expectations? There are probably more people who do not fit the stereotypes than who do. These individuals face even more discrimination because of their status as failures vis-à-vis the ethnic stereotype. Brazil is a society that has supposedly denounced racial discrimination. If people from the model minority do not succeed, it is thought it is because they have not made sufficient effort. The term itself creates a niche into which all members of the minority group ought to fit. Structural factors that may contribute to individual trajectories are ignored or discounted by the discourse in which such terms are embedded.

Terms like model minority and positive minority are actually oxymorons. As cognitive anthropologist Roy D'Andrade has pointed out, people's everyday understandings of the world are based on folk morality formed by people's subjective beliefs.⁵⁷ This explains why

⁵⁷ See Roy D'Andrade, "A Folk Model of Mind," in *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*, eds. Holland, D. C and N. Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): pp. 113-147; Roy D'Andrade, Moral Models in Anthropology *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 3 (1995a): pp. 399-408; Roy D'Andrade, *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1995b.

one finds completely opposite kinds of stereotypes developing toward Japanese Brazilians in Brazil and in Japan: Japanese Brazilians are seen as hardworking and very serious by non-Japanese Brazilians in Brazil, but they are seen as lazy and playful people in Japan. The characterization in each case is rooted in relative subjective positioning.

In the 1980s, the Brazilian economy suffered a number of setbacks, and inflation became as high as 1000 percent a year. In Japan, however, the Economic Miracle was in full swing until the 1990s. In Japan at this time, an average month's salary was almost the same as a year's salary in Brazil. At first some elderly Japanese immigrants in Brazil returned to Japan to work, hoping to make enough money to expand their businesses or farm fields, or rebuild houses for their children. Soon their children and grandchildren followed to Japan. Many of these Japanese Brazilians engage in manual labor jobs in Japan, making substantial sums of money. These workers were originally called *dekasegi* migrants. Today, the term *dekasegi* is applied to many in similar situations of transnational labor migration. Since they were seen as *japonês* in Brazil, these Japanese-Brazilian migrants were full of hope on "returning" to their ancestral home country. When I was living on a farm in a Japanese Brazilian community in 1992, some people who were going to Japan together through a *dekasegi* agency told me that while they were in Japan, they wanted to do a *O-baka-mairi* (pay a visit their ancestors' tombs)⁵⁸ and visit their Japanese relatives to get to know more about their family histories.

In contrast to what they expected, however, these Japanese-Brazilian migratory workers in Japan faced severe physical and psychological difficulties. Japanese are bound up with family genealogical relationships. Since Japanese Brazilians share the same

⁵⁸ This notion of *O-baka-mairi* is an old Japanese custom.

genealogy as some people in Japan, somehow it was expected that the Japanese Brazilians would speak and act like local Japanese and blend into society seamlessly. When I was visiting my parents in Japan, our neighbors told me that the local Japanese Brazilians were rude, and differed significantly from real Japanese. My neighbors and many others referred to the returning Japanese Brazilians as *Burajiru-jin* (“Brazilians”). Japanese-Brazilians, who have been labeled *japonês* in Brazil are now called *Burajiru-jin* in Japan.

Not only did the ethnic labels change—from “Japanese” to “Brazilian”—they also changed from a “positive minority” to “negative minority” when they arrived in Japan. Many Japanese Brazilians who are in Japan and engaging in manual labor are highly educated and have achieved economic success in Brazil, and have obtained a large measure of professional and social respectability. However since Japanese does not recognize Brazilian education, they are seen by Japanese in Japan only as poorly educated “foreigners” of some underprivileged country. The negative Japanese stereotypes of the lower classes Brazilians of Brazil—being lazy and poor—are also applied to Japanese Brazilians in Japan. How do these reversed stereotypes get reversed? How can both be applied to Japanese Brazilians? Because folk beliefs toward minorities develop under different social and historical environments, such “common sense” views are never objective but subjective.

In order to better understanding covert racial discourse and microaggression, and to understand the nature of racial categorizations and racisms, Brazil is a good laboratory. Along with the Japanese Brazilian case presented here, a study of the racial discourse used for immigrants especially German Brazilians in Brazil and in Germany, and Italian Brazilians in Brazil and in Italy, might be quite revealing. Although people of German descent in the United States are categorized as whites, German descendants in Brazil are addressed with ethnic labels like Japanese Brazilians are. Are they treated in Brazilian society the same way Japanese Brazilians are

treated? What about people of Italian descent in Brazil? They are another major ethnic group that plays an important role in the modern middle class of Brazil. Such studies would help enlighten two crucial issues concerning racism today. First, they would support the argument held by most social scientists that “race” is a social and political reality, but not a biological fact. Second they would reveal that racism is not only a legacy of history, but can be a current social construct—and a challenge to everyday life.

Conclusion

The history of the Japanese Brazilians started with a challenge to the ideology of trying to "whiten" the population. Being treated little better than slaves, Japanese-Brazilians were once separated from the rest of the Brazilian society in hinterlands of the forests. This encouraged Japanese Brazilians to maintain ties to their ancestral homeland, to perpetuate their concern for its well-being. And at the time of my study a majority of Japanese-Brazilians still had families, relatives, and friends back in Japan. It is likely that many did not want to think about the suffering that World War II caused back home. Probably no Japanese-Brazilian could accept Japan's defeat without having qualms or doubts. As Handa's recollections show, the majority of Japanese in Brazil were emotionally on the side of the Kachi-gumi faction at first. However it does not necessarily mean those people were conspiring against Brazil, or that they were unpatriotic.

The Kachi-gumi / Make-gumi conflict has left an impact on the Japanese-Brazilian community still evident to this day. The Kachi-gumi / Make-gumi conflict has never been viewed simply as the actions of a confused minority who were the pawns of both nations—Brazil and Japan. Instead, these people have been ridiculed by their own children and grandchildren, the incident banished from conversation. After the war, instead of vocalizing—or even recognizing—governmental discrimination against minorities, many

young Japanese-Brazilians just felt sad and ashamed of being of Japanese descent. They tried to hide their Japanese language ability and applied heavy makeup to their faces. Some wore glasses to hide their Asian-eyes.

Dismissing their parents and grandparents as uneducated farmers, the later generations wished to leave for the cities. Many left to receive higher educations and entered white-collar occupations. The greatest numbers of Japanese Brazilians today live in a city. There, as Tsuda reminds us, non-Japanese Brazilians pull their eyes upwards “with their fingers [making an] ... amusing commentary on their different physiognomy.” Japanese Brazilians who try to assimilate into Brazilian society simply have to accept such mocking gestures and being constantly called “foreigners” by strangers.

Japanese Brazilians are not free from racial discrimination by any means. But even though they are constantly being treated as “forever foreigners,” children of Japanese Brazilians are taught by even their own parents to believe they are not discriminated against. Thus, they accept Brazilian convert racial discourse and microaggression. Being a positive minority or a model minority is not a subjective characteristic of a minority group, but is a perspective imposed upon them from the outside. In this case, terms like “positive minority” or “racial democracy” are oxymoron. They are no different from being called a negative minority.

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